

Please  
Confidential

2/p/pncl/3

27. 10. '27.

Dear Miss Kitching,

I am very glad to have your letter. It gives me the opportunity to write fully to you about several things which have been troubling me.

The P.U.S. work has been modified here until it is almost unrecognisable as P.U.S. work. This is not the fault of the teacher of the form; I think very highly of her work in the school. It is due largely to circumstances beyond our control, and partly to the fact that I am not able fully to accept the whole of the P.N.E.U. programme as satisfactory.

The circumstances which are beyond our control are these. Many of the children who come to the school have not been working on the P.N.E.U. programmes; some of them have been. It is impossible to assume that the Form I programme has been done. This is a very real obstacle, which you mentioned in your first letter to me; at that time I did not appreciate its significance. We have found it most difficult to make proper headway with Form II Programme, which is the one appropriate for the children who enter the school.

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The second real difficulty is that the Programme, as it stands, and in this school, meets with severe criticism from the Inspectors. This would not trouble me very much, but I believe the Inspectors are right, and that the criticism is justified.

The criticism of the Programme, which I put forward as mine, is by no means a criticism of the methods of Miss Mason, or of the principles underlying the Programme. It is a criticism of the application of the principles. While I am fully in agreement with the P.N.E.U. in desiring to correlate the subjects in the curriculum and to have 'live' books, I still believe that correlation is a horse that can be ridden to death. I cannot agree, for instance, that *Macbeth*, *King John*, & *Coriolanus* are the most suitable of Shakespeare's works for children between the ages of 10 & 12. It may be a purely personal opinion, though I have met many experienced teachers of English & History who agree with me, that *Macbeth* from the stand-point of the History teacher & of the English teacher, Lytton's *Howard* is not particularly good for Form II; as I have already hinted, I have never appreciated Lytton as others seem to do. I am not very favourably disposed to *Scots on the March* for Form II. I think I can find much more suitable books than Arnold Forster's *History of England* & Geighie's *History of France*. The Programme in Science does not fall in line with the course at which we aim. This is very frank criticism & it may appear at first to be hostile criticism, but really it is not.

I can quite understand that another teacher may agree with the Programme in all its details, but my view is that it is a pity to send Programmes to schools. I am not



able to believe that there can be one Programme suitable for all schools. On the other hand, I think the Programme should be drawn up at the school by the people who are going to carry it out. In saying this, I do not wish to belittle the value of the Programmes. They may be most useful, in fact I know they are, to people who have to teach one or two pupils, in the home, in all subjects. No one person can be expected to be very expert in all subjects in a school curriculum. The Programmes make these people members of a larger body & help them to avoid the more obvious mistakes. In Primary Schools too, especially in those small ones in which a Head Teacher & one more or less qualified assistant do all the work, the Programmes help to secure a better curriculum than the Head Teacher could be expected to frame.

In Secondary Schools the situation is different. The curriculum is drawn up by the Head Master, or Head Mistress, who is usually an experienced teacher & a person of some attainment, with the help of specialists. This programme has to satisfy several demands, viz. its suitability to the environment of the pupils, the requirements of the Board of Education, and the demand of Local Authorities for success in external examination; this is obviously not <sup>a full list</sup> ~~an exhaustive~~ of the qualities essential in a liberal curriculum. As it is the tradition of Secondary Schools to have 'specialist' teachers, there is, or should be, in each one a body of people willing and competent to draw up <sup>for</sup> the school the best curriculum in the circumstances. My own experience is that teachers in those schools enter into this side of their work with great interest, enthusiasm & skill, & that the things which are most open to criticism in the programmes they draw up are those which are imposed upon them by circumstances which they cannot control.

There is one other very great difficulty to be faced by the P.N.E.U. in its relations with secondary schools, and that is in regard to staffing. It may be right or it may be wrong, but the tendency of the Universities is to train 'specialist teachers' and it is certainly ~~of~~ the tradition of the Secondary Schools to employ them. The teachers whom all Head Masters & Head Mistresses want, viz. those with special attainments, strong characters & personality, are just the ones who object very strongly to be tied down rigorously as to what they shall teach & how they shall teach it. I can see no great possibility of a sufficient supply of teachers willing to adhere to either one method or one programme. My own staffing experiences may interest you, but I shall be glad if you will regard them as stated for your private information only. I have studied most carefully all the applications I have received for the last two vacancies on my staff. For the first one, I advertised specifically for <sup>some</sup> one able to take up P.N.E.U. work. The applications were very poor indeed, and I obtained a teacher of the kind I wanted only through the recommendation of a County Hill. Plainly, a Head Master or Head Mistress cannot rely upon filling vacancies in this way. I have studied the advertisement columns in The Times Educational Supplement carefully for more than 2 years, and I do not remember one advertisement for such a teacher since my own appeared. In response to my last request for applications, I had one only from a man interested in P.N.E.U. methods. I wanted somebody able to take very elementary Mathematics, very elementary Science, & Geography with lower forms. This one candidate wrote to me, & I delayed making an appointment to give him a chance, to the effect that he would have ~~not~~ to consider his tutor as to his ability to teach the elementary Mathematics & Science! He was an Honourman, with quite a good degree! For very obvious reasons I could not appoint him.

I am afraid that you will think this is a letter of greater length than I have any right to inflict upon anybody. My only excuse is that it is connected with a subject which I know is of great interest to you, as it is to me. I am by no means satisfied with my own experiences of the P.N.E.U., because they have been affected by unusually



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unfavourable circumstances. These are gradually changing and things are improving. This experiment, carried on in unfavourable circumstances and in the presence of a very critical <sup>i.e. very critical</sup> frame of mind, has satisfied me that the underlying principles of the P. H. S. U. are sound. My school will always be influenced by them, even though in the matter of Programme I prefer to do my own thinking, assisted by my staff. I believe this would be the attitude of most Head Teachers of Secondary Schools.

From what I have said, it may be seen that I am afraid, you will see that I could do little good at a Conference of any kind. I know very little about Preparatory Schools, but if they are controlled by people who are keen & well-educated, I would strongly advocate that they should be left to draw up their own programmes, & that they should be interested rather in Miss Mason's methods & principles. The Programme is but ~~one~~ <sup>one</sup> ~~part~~ <sup>part</sup> application of those principles out of many possible ones; in any case it is by no means the best possible. It is just at this point that opinions vary, & action should, I think, be based on a loss of central principles.

Please forgive me for our long & very tiresome letter.

Yours very sincerely

J. W. Dickinson



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Parents' Union School,  
Ambleside.

~~31.10.1927.~~

a copy of the October P.R.  
which has been arranged  
for Preparatory Schools?

We are anxious to  
get as much help as we  
possibly can from Secondary  
Schools such as yours which  
will take the lead in  
showing what can be  
done both in Preparatory  
Schools State on.